

REDEEMING THE TIME

GROWING UP IN CHRIST

15c

Sundays after Pentecost



Pamphlets on the Liturgical Year

MARY PERKINS RYAN



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

Growing Up in Christ

Sundays after Pentecost

by

Mary Perkins Ryan

(With Study-Club Questions)



PAULIST PRESS
(Paulist Fathers)
180 Varick Street
New York 14, N. Y.

1962

NIHIL OBSTAT: William J. Collins, S.T.L., *Censor*

IMPRIMATUR: ✠ Ernest J. Primeau, S.T.D.,
Bishop of Manchester

August 28, 1962

The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

Copyright © 1962 by
The Missionary Society
of St. Paul the Apostle
in the State of New York.

Manufactured in the
United States of America by
Paulist Press, New York, N. Y.



Introduction

The Easter season which we have just been living with the Church celebrates the whole work of our redemption. As we have seen, this work was foreshadowed in the Old Testament; it was fully accomplished by Christ and in Him; it is continued here and now in the Church and in each of us; it will be completely achieved in the whole Church and all creation when He returns in glory. The Church's celebration re-presents all these dimensions of Christ's work and this is why it is the focus of the whole Christian year.

But this does not mean that when the Easter season ends on Pentecost Saturday we are to sink down to an "ordinary" level of Christian living until the onset of next Advent wakes us up again. During the seasons

of Lent, Passiontime and Easter, we came to know Christ in His redeeming work better than before. Through our sharing in the Church's sacramental and prayer-life, Christ renewed the grace of our baptism and confirmation. Now we can lead the Christian life more fully than before.

We are made able to do so above all by taking part in each Sunday's Mass. For Sunday is to each week what Easter is to the year—its focus and source of new life. Or, rather, since Sunday was the first Christian celebration, we should say that the "great Sunday" of the Easter season is to the year what Sunday is to each week—the celebration of Christ's resurrection and of our resurrection in Him.

The Lord's Day

Unlike the month and the year, the week does not come from any natural cycle, but from the revealed Word of God. In the book of Genesis, we learn of the six mysterious days of creation during which God "worked" and the seventh "on which He rested from all the work He had done." Human beings, made to His image and likeness, are likewise to work for six days, imitating and continu-

ing His creative work in their own way, and then to rest on the seventh, the Sabbath.

When our Lord so pointedly worked His miracles of healing and forgiveness on the Sabbath, when He made and called Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," He was showing that in Him God was once again taking up His work, to heal it, restore it, re-make it, after it had been spoiled by sin.

God brought this work of re-creation to completion in the Risen Christ and did so on the first day of the Jewish week, when Christ rose from the dead and showed Himself to His disciples. He showed Himself again a week later. And it was on another first day that He sent the Holy Spirit on the infant Church. Very early in Christian history, then, the first day of the week began to be the regular day for the "breaking of the Bread," the celebration of the Eucharist. As time went on, the reading-service customary on the Jewish Sabbath was connected with this weekly Eucharist, and Sunday completely replaced the Sabbath as the Christian holy day.

Sunday is therefore the Lord's Day, not only in the sense of replacing the Sabbath as the day "holy to the Lord," but even more because it is the day on which Jesus in His

human nature became "the Lord," established at the right hand of the Father as the principle of the new creation, Head of His Body the Church, source of life to all who believe in Him, Judge of the living and the dead. As the day of the Lord's resurrection, Sunday is also the day of our resurrection in Him, the weekly commemoration of our baptism. (We are reminded of this by taking holy water as we enter the church and by the Asperges ceremony before the Sunday High Mass.) And Sunday is the day of anticipating the final completion of Christ's work, the life of praise and love which will be wholly ours in the world of the resurrection, the world to come.

All this is actualized and re-presented in the Sunday Mass, in which "the whole work of our redemption is renewed." Here we meet our Risen Lord in the assembly of His own; we hear Him speaking through the living voice of His minister; we offer His Eucharistic prayer and sacrifice made present by the priest who acts in His Person; we receive Him as our Bread, the anticipation and pledge of our partaking in the eternal marriage-feast of heaven. This is all true, of course, of every Mass. But it is true of the Sunday Mass in a special way, since Sunday is the day on which

the Risen Lord appeared to His disciples, spoke with them and ate and drank with them; and Sunday Mass is the primordial Christian gathering and celebration. This is why the Sunday Masses are so important in themselves and as the focus of our life from week to week—so important that in some seasons no feasts can replace the Sunday Mass Propers and in the other seasons only major feasts can do so.

“We Know That We Passed from Death to Life”

The Sundays after Pentecost bring out the essential aspects of Christ’s redeeming work in us, “Christ in you, your hope of glory.” This is the season for realizing more and more fully what the redemption means in our daily lives, for “growing up in all things in Christ.”

So the chants of these Masses express our sense of the paradox of the Christian life—the fact that we already share in Christ’s triumph and yet are still sharing in His sufferings and in His warfare with the powers of evil. And we are meant to pray these psalms with the whole Church—the songs of deliverance already secure, with the triumphant Church in heaven; the songs appealing for help in

distress, with all our suffering and struggling fellow men on earth.

The Epistles of the Sunday Masses bring out the glory of our resurrection in Christ by baptism, the wonder of the gift of the Spirit, and the kind of lives we should be leading as a result, looking forward to Christ's return and our complete sharing in His glory. The Gospels give us Christ's own instructions in the Christian life and His miracles describing what He is doing for us in the Church. For example, the Gospel of the 2nd Sunday gives us the parable of the marriage-feast, showing us how we should respond to Christ's invitation to eternal life and His invitation to the banquet of Communion, the sacramental sign and cause of that life. Then the Gospel of the 6th Sunday gives us the miracle of feeding the four thousand, a "sign" of the Eucharist.

But both Epistles and Gospels stress above all the love for our neighbor which Christ commanded at the Last Supper—love modeled on His, love shown by deeds. As we saw in Passiontime and Holy Week, it was by this obedient self-sacrificing love that Christ paid our debt to the eternal Father—the debt of our lack of love, our disobedience. And now

our "walking in love" after His example is the way in which we show our love of God in daily life, the way in which we carry out God's Law.

We might, then, make this love of neighbor the matter for our self-examination during this season. Are we learning a little better each day how to love the members of our family with that truly unselfish love which seeks their greatest good and not the indulgence of our own weakness or desire to please or show off or play the martyr? Do we do our daily work as a service of love for those who use the goods or services we provide by it? Are we taking as much interest as we can in the affairs of our parish, our community, our country, the world, so as to work for, vote for and express opinions that are on the side of justice and the reform of society to make justice and freedom possible to everyone? St. John says in the Epistle for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, "We know that we have passed from death to life *because* we love the brethren. . . . Let us love, not in words or in speaking only, but in deed and in truth." This love has to permeate every aspect of our lives, if we are to remain and grow in the life of Christ.

The Feasts of This Season

In these pamphlets so far, we have said nothing about the feasts of Christ, His mother and the saints which belong to what is called the "Proper of the Saints." The reason is that it is the "Proper of the time," carried on mainly by the Sunday Masses, which gives us the current of the Church's life from week to week, the current in which we are to live and act so as to "grow up in all things in Christ."

This does not mean that the other feasts and celebrations are unimportant, but that they have different purposes—to focus our attention on some doctrine, to encourage us and give us hope, to unite us with our brothers and sisters in heaven. These feasts are all ancillary to our life in the Church, our life in Christ, and so we are speaking of them last, in order to put first things first.

This after-Pentecost season opens with three major feasts which are included in the "Proper of the Time" but are of this same kind—the Feast of the Blessed Trinity on the first Sunday after Pentecost, the Feast of Corpus Christi and the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

The Feast of the Blessed Trinity celebrates the mystery of God's inner life as revealed and

opened out to us in Christ; Corpus Christi, the mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist; and the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the mystery of the divine-human love of Christ for His Father and for us, shown in His whole redeeming work. If we are to celebrate these feasts rightly, we need to understand what the word "mystery" means. This is particularly necessary for the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, both because a mistaken meaning is so often brought out in preaching and teaching and because the Preface of the Trinity is used for the Sunday Masses from now till Christmas-time.

Too often the word "mystery" is taken to mean something we cannot understand, which God reveals to us through the Church simply in order to test our faith. This is almost the exact opposite of the proper Christian meaning. For "mystery," in the usage of St. Paul and of Christian tradition, means a reality of the divine life or the divine counsels, unattainable by human reason and by its nature "hidden in God," which God reveals to us out of His love for us and His desire to have us share His life. The emphasis, therefore, is not so much on the hiddenness as on God's revelation of it in Christ.

St. Paul speaks of "the Mystery" or the "mystery of Christ," meaning the whole of God's self-revelation and self-giving to us in Christ in all its dimensions, centered in the Person of Christ dead and risen, the Head of His Church, the principle of the new creation. This is the most proper use of the word, the one from which all other Christian uses are derived. The term is used also to describe various aspects of this one great "Mystery," and so we speak of the "mystery of Christmas" or of the Eucharist, or "the mysteries of the Rosary"—always having in mind what God is revealing and giving to us through Christ in these various kinds of realities. Again, the sacraments and particularly the Eucharistic Sacrifice called "mysteries," at once revealing and giving us Christ's grace, effecting what they signify. And so the term is used also to describe God's supreme revelation of His inner life as the life of the Father and the Son with one another in the Holy Spirit.

As we saw during the Easter season, God did not reveal this as an abstract proposition: "There is one God in three divine Persons." This is a formulation of later theology, reflecting on revelation. He had prepared the minds of Christ's Apostles by the Old Testa-

ment revelations concerning both the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Then Jesus, the Word made flesh, opened out to the Apostles very slowly, in a way suited to their human understanding, the truth of His Sonship and of the Spirit as a divine Person and He gave them the Spirit to lead them into the truth He had revealed. But again, He did so not as a truth to be wondered at in the abstract, but as the supreme truth of the life He came to bring us. We are to be "sons in the Son," filled with the Spirit. God wishes to be *our* Father, making us His adopted children, as He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The mystery of the Trinity opens out to us at once God's nearness and His infinite holiness and "otherness." "No man has seen God at any time. The only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him." St. Irenaeus calls the Son and the Spirit the infinitely holy "hands" of God whereby He reaches out to draw us to Himself. Again, the Son is the "arm" and the Spirit the "finger" with which God touches us and forms us to the likeness of His Son. "No man comes to the Father but by Me."

We are to celebrate the feast of the Blessed Trinity, therefore, not as a "test of faith,"

but as the feast of God's marvelous love for us, opening out to us His inner life with His Son and calling us to share in it, creatures though we are. This is why the Epistle praises the "depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" and why, as the Gospel tells us, we are baptized "in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit." While this is not the historical reason, it is a good psychological reason why the Preface of the Trinity is said on all these Sundays of our "growing up in all things in Christ."

The Feasts of Corpus Christi, of the Sacred Heart, of the Precious Blood (July 1), of the Transfiguration (August 6), of the Finding of the Cross (September 14) have various historical origins. But each of these feasts gives us the opportunity to thank God our Father for some special aspect of His revealing and giving Himself to us in Christ. Each gives us the opportunity to celebrate the love of Christ under one or another aspect, and to ask for the special graces that will form us to the image of Christ in some particular way.

Feasts of the Holy Mother of God

During this season, we have several feasts of the Mother of God—her Visitation (July

2), the great feast of her Assumption, her birthday and name (September 8 and 12), her sorrows (September 15). In these feasts, we praise God for Mary's fullness of grace; we praise Him for making a human person so perfect and so perfectly co-operative with His design. We praise her Son, for she is the perfect achievement of His redeeming work. We praise the Spirit who overshadowed her and made her the Mother of God. And we praise her for her complete, unshadowed and free co-operation with God's grace, for hearing and doing the Word of God so perfectly.

As we saw in Advent, we cannot imitate Mary's unique glories, but we can imitate her in faith; we can imitate her as she "turned all these things over in her heart," as she heard the Word of God and put it into practice. On her feasts and every day, we ask her to "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death," that in spite of our weakness and sinfulness and selfishness, God's design may be carried out in us and in our fellow men.

Feasts of the Saints

During this season also we have the great feasts of the Birthday of St. John the Baptist and of the Apostles Peter and Paul, in addi-

tion to many other feasts of apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and holy women. Like the holy Mother of God, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles and St. Joseph have unique roles in the history of salvation. When we celebrate their feasts, we are praising God for giving such a share in His Son's work to these chosen human beings, and we are praising them for their co-operation with His call and with His grace. To a lesser degree, this is also true of all the feasts of the saints. In their various ways, these holy men and women all carried out God's plan, all co-operated with His grace and hastened the complete coming of His Kingdom.

The earliest feasts of saints to be celebrated by the Church were those of martyrs — the anniversaries of their "birthdays" into the glory of heaven. The word "martyr" means "witness," and the martyr is the most perfect witness to Christ, since he lays down his life as Christ did and for His sake. Again, from the earliest times, some Christian men and women had led lives of special renunciation, voluntarily giving up earthly blessings so as to be the freer for the Lord's service and freer to welcome His coming. This was done also by Jewish communities, such as the one discovered at Qumran.

But in Christianity the emphasis came to be placed on the renunciation of marriage, because now, in the Church, the reality signified by marriage could be attained without going by way of the sign—the union of the Church with Christ, the union of the redeemed with God in Christ. During the ages of persecution, it became clear that such a life of voluntary asceticism was the best preparation for martyrdom, for giving up everything, even life itself, when called upon to do so for Christ's sake.

Later such a life itself was seen as a form of martyrdom, even though not crowned by a martyr's death. It is a form of witnessing to Christ and of voluntarily dying to the world and to self for the sake of His love. And so the feasts of holy "confessors" (the word means almost the same as "martyr"—one who publicly professes his faith in Christ) and of virgins who were not martyrs, began to be celebrated.

It was further realized that heroic witnessing to Christ could be carried out in any Christian way of life. To the lists of saints were added the names of holy men and women who had been married and who had pursued the ordinary occupations of their state (a "confessor" may equally well be a priest,

a religious or a layman). In our times, this possibility of heroic holiness in any way of life has been very strongly emphasized, both by canonizations of people who did nothing outwardly extraordinary in their lives, like St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and by the qualifications laid down for canonization — the consistent and heroic carrying out of the duties of one's vocation, whatever this may be.

The feasts of the saints, we can see, show us how Christ has been imitated in many different ways and under many circumstances, by many different kinds of men and women. And so these feasts encourage us: where the saints are now, there we too hope to be; they were men and women as we are, but made strong with Christ's strength, the strength He gives us and will never fail to give us. Besides, these holy men and women, who were filled with concern for their fellow men and for God's kingdom while on earth, are still concerned for us and for the final completion of God's saving work. We may confidently ask God to let them continue to carry on His work by interceding for their brothers and sisters on earth.

Suggestions for Daily Prayer

In addition to the Epistles and Gospels of

the Sunday Masses, as matter for our daily prayer during this season, we might well take those of the feasts of the saints; not necessarily every day, but at least now and then. The Apocalypse and the Epistle to the Hebrews are also particularly appropriate to this season, since each in a very different way presents the struggle and the victory of the Christian life here on earth and in heaven.

In the Roman Breviary during this season, the Church takes the Books of Kings and the "sapiential books": Proverbs, Wisdom, Sirach and Ecclesiasticus and, finally Job. The books of Kings show us God working with recalcitrant human nature like our own; we gain from them the "consolation of Scripture," that St. Paul speaks of, by seeing how, even though God's chosen servants and His chosen people failed Him again and again, His loving mercy was always at hand to save them when they returned to Him—even from the depths of their infidelity. And, among the sapiential books, we should try to read at least the Book of Job, since it shows us what we all need to learn—that God is above all our reasoning and planning. He is to be trusted even when His ways are completely beyond our understanding: "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Job's wrestling

with God in the depths of his misery and God's final vindication of him teach us the lesson we all need in real distress: that we may complain, we may even argue with God and still be His servants; the only thing not to do is to turn away from Him, whatever He allows to happen to us.

These pamphlets have brought out the major themes of the Church's seasons, in the hope of indicating to the reader something of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" which He has ready for us in the life of the Church. If in conclusion there is one idea which needs to be emphasized more than another, it is that our life in the Church is meant to be continual growth, continual striving, continual preparation and looking forward to what is ahead. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' He who hears, let him say, 'Come.' Amen, Come, Lord Jesus."

Study-Club Questions

1. The American Sunday is a day for visiting and being visited; for various forms of more or less strenuous recreation; for driving around; for working at odd jobs and hobbies which there is no time for during the week. How can all this be best carried out in the spirit of the Lord's Day?

2. How would you attempt to describe the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity to an inquiring non-Christian?
3. How would you show a questioner that devotion to the Mother of God and to the saints is essentially devotion to Christ?

Suggestions for Reading

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Prayer*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961.

McEleney, Neil J. *Pamphlet Bible Series* (Nos. 37, 38, 39, 40, 41). New York: Paulist Press, 1961.

New Testament Reading Guide (Nos. 7 and 14). Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1961.

Parsch, Pius. *The Church's Year of Grace* (Vol. 4). Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Pinsk, Johannes. *Toward the Center of Christian Living*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1961.

